

Which Philosophy Personally Appeals More to You, Buddhism or Advaita Vedanta?

(This is a repost of the answer that I wrote in Quora for the same question)

Both point to the same truth!

I have noticed that many people don't agree when it is said both are the same, because they are only looking at both of them in philosophical level. When it comes to ultimate reality, no matter what words we use, they can be always misleading.

I am talking from my own experience. Oneness with the rest of the existence is a living reality for me. But I will back up my statements by quoting both Vedantic and Buddhist scriptures.

The main source of suffering in our lives is caused by identification. We get identified with our mind, our body, our thoughts, our emotions etc. This identification of mistaking something that is not Self as Self is termed as Avidya or ignorance. Ignorance causes us to think that there is a separate individual self which needs to be protected and enhanced.

In other words, we feel experientially that we are separate from the rest of the world. This separation causes us to crave for fulfillment. That is why Buddha said craving is the root cause of suffering. It is Avidya, the ignorance which causes craving. Buddha is talking about the immediate cause and Vedanta is talking about the original cause.

Some people will object to this by saying that Buddhism doesn't say that there is something eternal. First of all, when you realize that time itself is an illusion, you will also realize that eternity is only an idea. Buddha was more specific and straight forward, while Vedanta is little compassionate and gives you something that your mind can grasp.

When anyone asked Buddha any metaphysical questions such as 'Is there anything eternal', Buddha was silent. It is called Noble Silence. He talked about the impermanence of aggregates, but what we call in Vedanta as absolute reality is not one of the aggregates. It is not anything that is objective. It cannot be put into words. But both Vedanta and Buddhism has actually hinted about this absolute reality with striking similarity.

See the below examples:

Vedanta:

"It is this Akshara (the Imperishable), O Gargi, so the knowers of Brahman say. It is neither gross nor subtle, neither short nor long, not red, not viscid, not shadowy, not dark, not the air, not the ether, not adhesive, tasteless, odourless, without the sense of sight, without the sense of hearing, without the vital principle, mouthless, without measure, neither interior nor exterior,. It eats nothing, nobody eats it."

– Brihadaranyaka Upanishad 3-8-8.

Buddhism:

"There is that dimension, monks, where there is neither earth, nor water, nor fire, nor wind; neither dimension of the infinitude of space, nor dimension of the infinitude of consciousness, nor dimension of nothingness, nor dimension of neither perception nor non-perception; neither this world, nor the next

world, nor sun, nor moon. And there, **I say, there is neither coming, nor going, nor staying; neither passing away nor arising: unestablished, unevolving, without support [mental object]. This, just this, is the end of stress.**”

– Buddha (in Nibbāna Sutta: Unbinding (1))

Buddha directly talks about something that is eternal too, but he uses the word ‘unborn’:

There is, monks, an unborn— unbecome — unmade — unfabricated. If there were not that unborn — unbecome — unmade — unfabricated, there would not be the case that escape from the born — become — made — fabricated would be discerned. But precisely because there is an unborn — unbecome — unmade — unfabricated, escape from the born — become — made — fabricated is discerned

– Buddha (in Nibbāna Sutta: Unbinding (3))

So, why did Buddha reject Vedas when Vedanta says that Vedas are the only authority?

We need to take Buddha’s time into account. Buddha lived sometime around 800 BC- 600 BC. It was during those times when many rishis were able to realize that there is something beyond the benefits that was got from mere rituals..Vedic rituals only focused on materialistic benefits that people could enjoy in three worlds. They were never about ultimate reality. That is when two great upanishads, Brihadaranyaka upanishad and Chandgoya upanishads were compiled. It must have taken a century or two; Buddha started talking to people at the same time period. So, we can safely conclude that when Buddha was alive, upanishads were not a part of Vedas.

This will raise many objections. Because, many people believe that Vedas are eternal and infallible. Even Shankara believed so. But, consider the following verses from Brihadaranyaka upanishad and the commentary from Shankara:

From chapter 6, section 4:

Verse 6: If man sees his reflection in water, he should recite the following Mantra : ‘ (May the gods grant) me lustre, manhood, reputation, wealth and merits.’ She (his wife) is indeed the goddess of beauty among women. Therefore he should approach this handsome woman and speak to her.

Shankara’s commentary:

If perchance he sees his reflection in water, he should recite the following Mantra : ‘(May the gods grant) me lustre,’ etc. She is indeed the goddess of beauty among women. Therefore he should approach this handsome woman and speak to her, when she has taken a bath after three ‘nights.

Verse 7 : If she is not willing, he should buy her over; and if she is still unyielding, he should strike her with a stick or with the hand and proceed, uttering the following Mantra, ‘I take away your reputation,’ etc. She is then actually discredited.

Shankara’s commentary:

If she is not willing, he should buy her over, press his wishes through ornaments etc.; and **if she is still unyielding, he should strike her with a stick or with the hand**, and announcing that he was going to curse her and make her unfortunate, he should proceed, uttering the following Mantra : ‘I take away your reputation: etc. As a result of that curse, she comes to be known as barren and unfortunate, and is then actually discredited.

The above verses show how totally male dominative the society was those days.. Even though this doesn’t have anything to do with enlightenment, this example shows how one should not take everything just because it comes from a scripture or a person who is regarded as an authority.

And I don’t think that such infallible and eternal upanishads can advice someone to beat his wife if she doesn’t agree for sex.

You may say that these were later interpolations. But if that is the case, how could we trust Vedas in the first place?

But I know that Vedic verses such as Nasadiya Suktha and almost all upanishads have immense wisdom. We have to see them as collection of various poems composed by different people, instead of seeing them as infallible and eternal scriptures. I know that it is very difficult for many Indians to accept, because we are deeply blinded by pride and confirmation bias.

So, Why did Vedanta say that Vedas are only pramana (means of knowledge)?

Let us talk about three different methods of acquiring knowledge in general. (Vedanta uses six, but let us talk about three important ones here)

1. Direct experience
2. Inference
3. Testimony from an authority.

In our daily life, we can get to know about many things through direct experience and inference. But we would never know the path to end the suffering unless someone tells us, simple!

So our ancient Indians selected the Upanishads as the only reliable authority to teach us the path towards liberation. It is just a standardization made by humans to avoid any conflict. And according to the social structure that prevailed those days, instead of relying any random person’s words as authority, it was reasonable to accept Upanishads as authority.

But we live in 21st century now. We are aware of things like confirmation bias and we are more keen towards human rights. While we do appreciate and show immense reverence to our ancient scriptures, it is nothing wrong in changing certain things to suit our modern society.

Also, Vedanta uses a certain teaching method called Adyaropa Apavada while Buddhism teaches directly and precisely. Vedanta is poetic where as Buddhism is empirical. Buddhism gives you the raw truth but Vedanta offers to you with added sweets and flavors. The only problem in Vedanta is that people may get stuck with the words and concepts.

You can find more details in my post here where I have included some additional points: [Buddhism and Vedanta are the Same – A Detailed Comparison](#)

If you are looking for a great spiritual authority to confirm the validity of Buddha’s message, then I will quote some of the words from Bhagwan Ramana Maharishi:

Disciple: Research on God has been going on from time immemorial. Has the final word been said?

Maharshi: (Keeps silence for some time.)

Disciple: (Puzzled) Should I consider Sri Bhagavan's silence as the reply to my question?

Maharshi: Yes. Mouna is Isvara-svarupa. Hence the text: "The Truth of Supreme Brahman proclaimed through Silent Eloquence."

Disciple: Buddha is said to have ignored such inquiries about God.

Maharshi: And for this reason was called a sunyavadin (nihilist). In fact Buddha concerned himself more with directing the seeker to realize Bliss here and now that with academic discussion about God, etc.

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